Rubens Club for Plump Women

"DRESS SOCIETY" AFTER IDEAS OF THE GREAT PAINTER.

An Artist Designs Gowns and Is Expensive, But Very Satisfactory.

New York, Sept. 27.—The stout women of this city have banded together in a society calling itself the Rubens Club. Its object is the study and promotion of gowns and other wearing apparel for women who weigh more than 140 pounds or are too stout for their height.

PRESIDENT OF THE RUBENS CLUB.
This Is a Club Formed in New York City for Dressing Stout Women After Rubens' Ideas.

In the days of the painter Rubens stout women were the most fashionable creatures that walked the face of the earth. Rubens would paint none other than those of very firm build, and so artistically did he drape them, so cleverly did he pose them and so well did he color them that every woman aspired to sit for his pictures. To be painted by Rubens was a guarantee of beauty, grace, and feminine loveliness of every description.

FORMING THE CLUB.

The stout women of New York society have felt themselves particularly slighted by the fashions of the fall. These new styles are without exception for the sylph. The sleeves bagging at the elbow, where the stout woman is thickest, across the body; the waists pinched low, where it is simply impossible for her to pinch herself without mediæval torture; the skirts of some shortness—all make her like a country guy or woman of advanced ideas and behind-the-times style. And so the Rubens Club came into existence.

The Rubens Club has twenty members. Its numbers are limited, and not more than forty will ever be allowed in the club. One of its aims is the designing of dresses for the members. A professional designer is employed, and he—for a man has been chosen who is an artist of no mean merit—contracts to supply designs for six gowns a season for each of the members. Obviously he cannot design for more than forty women at the most. At present the members are only twenty, and membership is closed until spring.

The Rubens woman is a stout woman of good figure. Stout women nearly always have fine forms. Their bust line is good. It is low, and the neck curve full, even if not very long. The Rubens artist makes the most of these good points and conceals others.

To be quite specific, the president of the Rubens Club, who is a woman of beauty and wealth and great loveliness of manner, had the honor of having the first gown designed for herself, and here is its pattern. As it was to be worn at a club dinner, which she was to give for introducing the club members to each other, the gown was made an evening robe.

A RUBENS GOWN.

The materials were dead white cashmere and dull black satin, with a very little lace and jet. The under gown, or the gown itself, more strictly speaking, fell from the shoulders in a long, loose robe. In the front there was a center trimming of black satin and lace, and a heavy ruffle of lace outlined the bust and suggested the waist. The back fitted closely, and around the foot extended a deep band of the black.

Over the Rubens gown fell a robe of the satin. It was caught at each shoulder and fell into a train three feet long when the wearer walked. In repose it lay around her feet, giving her height and a becoming setting.

From a mere description of this dress it seems like a massive affair, giving size without taking any away. But when its good points are seen a different view is taken of it.

The good points of this gown are, first, the way it showed off the very plump neck of the wearer. The fine throat line was visible, but at the shoulders, where, too, much massiveness takes the place of fine firm flesh, the robe was draped. The arms were likewise covered at the top, their thickest part, and, as the robe fell over them when in repose, much of their apparent size disappeared.

The robe had one very odd feature. The train was a double one. The back of the robe was a little more than walking length, but the ends were very long indeed. This made a square court train like a monarch's robe, and could be easily brought front by the hand, for trimming or drapery when the wearer was not walking.

The front of the dress might have been too severe, were it not cut in a peculiar manner. Instead of falling straight, it had the appearance of all coming from the neck. The indrawn bands of lace of a contrasting color deprived it of all suggestiveness of night apparel. In truth, it had a really royal effect, with a few sparkling jets added.

In choosing the color of the gown to be snow-white instead of cream color, the artist knew what he was specifying. White is a diminishing color, while cream color enlarges. The same with black satin. Satin, being full of lights and shades, is uncertain in size, and it is preferable to silk or velvet, which makes the person thicker. The jets are dressy, wicked little ornaments that wink at you unexpectedly and disappear.

One of the plans of the Rubens Club is to devote afternoons to selecting colors for gowns. The artist assists, and a sufficient supply of material is at hand to allow an exercise of personal taste also. The colors ordered sent to the clubrooms for the next meeting are dull grays, bright blues, faded greens and all kinds of deep reds.

The manner of judging these colors is very entertaining. The rooms are planned so that a brilliant sunshine can be let in and also entirely shut out. You can flood the room with brightness or make it blacker than night. Then there is electricity and also gas. For judging materials all the tests are employed.

Suppose a piece of red goods is to be chosen by a member who likes red and who has nothing in her wardrobe of that color. The room is first flooded with light and the red brought out and spread over a chair back. If it becomes bright to the sight and looks a shade lighter than it did when in the piece, it is discarded for another. The next piece of red holds its color in the sun. It does not, in artists' language, "brighten." It is laid aside as acceptable. So far so good.

The dark test is next applied. The room is made black by letting it grow darker little by little. One blind is closed, then another and another. As the room grows darker the members sit in chairs around the room looking at the piece of red. If it gradually grows dull and disappears in certain lights it is the piece wanted. It often happens that a piece of quite bright red looks black in certain lights. If this is the case with the piece under discussion it is selected as a very good material for the stout members of the Reubens Club to wear.

After the gaslight and electric tests have been put upon it it is laid aside. In the gaslight it must not show stripes, as so many goods do, and in the electric light it must not come out in white patches. Many red and blue goods look white in certain brilliant electric lights. But there are certain good colors that hold their own through all.

THAT AWFUL CURVE.

After the colors have all been chosen comes the artist's real work. Of course, the hardest thing he has to do is to fit out his patrons with street gowns that shall be conventional and yet accord with the ideas of Rubens. They must "drape," yet by no means be unfashionable. To do this he has this fall taken advantage of the cape idea. Golf capes are his salvation in traveling gowns. A stout woman in a neat-fitting gown, not too close under the bust, looks picturesque with a golf cape swinging from one shoulder. It gives her height. The dolmans that open in front and fall low at each side are admirable also, according to his ideas.

He does a clever thing also with belts. Every woman must have a belt line. She may not wear a belt and buckle, but her basque ends near the belt line and her figure plainly shows the place where waist ends and skirt begins. This is the most trying region for a stout woman. The awful swell of the stomach, the terrible rise of the bust, and the pinched zone that she cannot conceal, make her the horror of those who find embonpoint creeping upon them.

The artist of the Rubens Club takes the bull boldly by the horns. He grasps the lower part of the bodice heavily and fastens it to a belt of satin or ribbon. This he brings down to a long, low point in the front and to another in the back. The woman always objects at first, thinking it is going to make her look large. But wait until she has seen herself in the mirror.

The bust of the Rubens woman is never forced up. It is low, and she never has the choked look of the high-busted woman, nor the muffled throat. Nor are her hips horrors of size. The artist does away with the pair of square shoulders which stout women ordinarily wear upon their hips by giving them the long, low belt line.

The Rubens society is composed of wealthy women, for none others could afford the dues of artist and modiste. But the members hope that so good may be their example in dress that before long, the stout, puffing, ruddy, choked, fat woman will be a thing of the far past.

HELEN WARD.

New Flowers For the Show

RUTH CLEVELAND WILL BRING OUT A CHRYSANTHEMUM.

A Corner Built Especially for Her—Lady Rachel Dunraven's Blooms.

Preparations are now under way for the cycle of flower shows, spreading across the country every autumn. These begin with the taking in of the plants and last until the pride of the winter, the last gaudy chrysanthemum, has drooped its tired head.

In New York the annual flower show is held almost simultaneously with the horse show, the visitors to each alternating in their attentions to the separate affairs. One year the horse show followed the flower show in Madison Square Garden, and it was a funny sight to see the first equine arrivals craning their necks for a nip of the stately palms and a taste of the white blossoms that hung down into their stalls.

The flower show is for professionals, but it is always astonishing to know how very many of the finest flowers come from the conservatories of those who have no object in raising the flowers, except their own love of them.

BABY RUTH'S FLOWER.

This year there will be a brand new chrysanthemum shown in the greatest flower show of the winter. This chrysanthemum, is only one of the many new ones, but it is remarkable for two things, its color and the fact that it comes from the White House conservatory, where it was raised largely by the hands of the President's oldest baby daughter.

This flower is called the Marion. It was propagated from cuttings a year ago, and was carefully watched all the season. Its soil was renewed, experiments of grafting were tried upon it, and, finally, towards spring, it sent out a frail white flower, which showed what the strength of the full blooming would be in the fall. The plant was the property of Miss Ruth, and on being asked to name it, she bestowed the name of Marion, little thinking that later there would be a baby sister to receive the same much-liked title.

The Marion chrysanthemum is snow-white. It is very large through the center. Its top is almost round, and, though not large in actual circumference, it is very heavy. It is like the snowball chrysanthemum, but thicker and of a better ball-like shape. The petals of the flower are round rather than pointing, and it is very hardy, and holds its own longer after being cut than do the other varieties of white. Its calyx is a very vivid green, and its position on the stem is nodding, as though it were a very heavy burden, as indeed it is.

The improvements upon the White House this fall have consisted principally in additions to the conservatory. The foundation had crumbled away until there was danger of the building sagging. This has been repaired and a wing constructed. The cost was $10,000 all told.

In spending such a large sum of money the designers found no difficulty in acceding to the few requests Mrs. Cleveland had to make of them. One was that a small corner be constructed for the use of little Ruth. The child is so passionately fond of plants that she is continually "borrowing" her mother's palms, as she calls it, when she waters the pots and cuts off a leaf for placing in a vase in the nursery. In the new conservatory she will have a "corner" of her own. It lies between two long windows and there is a small recess wide enough for a child to pass in and out. This is filled with the Marion chrysanthemum at present, and little Ruth's first act upon getting back will be to run to see if the corner is all that has been promised her.

FAMOUS LILY PADS.

The Gould and Pullman families always make very important additions to the flowers of the autumn show. The Gould exhibit this year will be of water lilies. Miss Helen Gould has imported from South America a new species of brilliant white and red lily which grows upon the surface of the water and does not close at night. Its leaves are very large, and so thick and strong that they can easily carry 100 pounds upon their surface.

The place for growing these water plants at present is upon a pool that is in the lily-house at Irvington. This pool and its conservatory are very cunningly constructed. The conservatory is all of glass, and it is built over the pool. During the summer the glass is removed and the framework taken down; but on the first frosty day the frame is run up, the sash slipped in, and the pond inclosed. Thus, there are lilies all winter.

A large stock of these, growing in tubs, if possible, will be taken to the flower show and an exhibit of the cut lilies placed near by. They are not fragile out of water and make very decorative plants. The small nephews and nieces of Miss Gould, the children of George and Edwin, play around the lily pads, finding immense fascination there, and when one day a caretaker lifted little Helen Vivien and the small Edwin, jr., until they stood side by side on a lily pad their joy knew no bounds.

The principal flower of the autumn is always the chrysanthemum, and it grows yearly stronger in its hold upon the people. One reason is its hardiness, and another is its great variety. Cultivators of the plants find perpetually something new to observe, and a new flower rewards them each season.

MRS. CRUGER'S FLOWER.

"Titian Tress" is the name given to one of the new plants. It is a fanciful one, suggested by the blonde locks of the lady in whose conservatory it grows. Titian Tress is the property of Mrs. Van Rensselaer Cruger, and the plant was so named by her gardener, who worked diligently to get it in the shade he wanted it. You have seen the striped chrysanthemum with the yellow, white and red petals, like garden dahlias of olden times. Well, the Titian Tress is like this, only all the yellow and white petals have been eliminated until the the red alone remain. This was done by cultivating only the plants that showed more red petals than any other, until finally the right effect was reached. The color of the tress is almost terra cotta at the base, while the tips lighten with a touch of gold. It is the rarest and most beautiful flower seen this year.

The pains spent upon the plants by the amateurs, who have made a reputation cultivating them, would hardly be believed by one less interested in plant culture. Flower growers acknowledge this, while confessing their own inability to compete with it.

In the greenhouse of O. H. P. Belmont, to take a name that smacks of entire gold and boundless extravagance, there is an automatic appliance for sprinkling plants at night, as though wet with dew. This is turned on at dusk and plays very gently all night. The stream is a tiny one, so small that you hold out your hand twice to be sure that it is really falling, and so steady that it never ceases for a second. It is done by turning a powerful force into a nozzle attachment filled with the tiniest holes. As the water spouts through these it is put through another set of holes and whirled upward 100 feet in the air. Here all the drops burst.

Helen Gould's Lily-Pad Park.

At dawn this is turned off and when visitors to the hothouse speak of the "beautiful green tint" of the leaves—deep, shiny and unshaded—the host smiles mysteriously, but explains nothing.

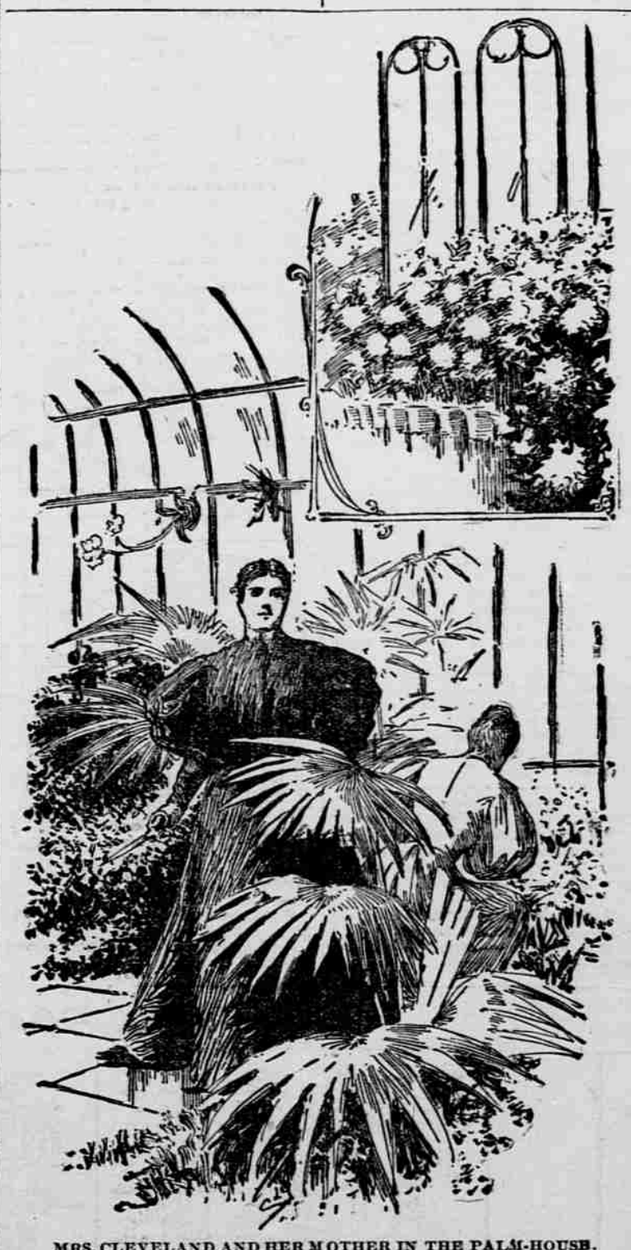
The Ladies Dunraven—Misses Eileen Quin and Rachel Quin—have a pretty conservatory of their own. They contribute each year to the London flower show, and are as proud of their plants as of their father's yachts.

THE DUNRAVEN PRIDE.

Their principal flower is the Japanese favorite—the chrysanthemum. Last year Lady Rachel had the pleasure of producing an all-green flower. It was small but very compact, with pointing, ragged petals. This she sent to the Duchess of York upon her birthday, and received a very grateful acknowledgment. Each sister has her own hothouse, and they relate with much pride the history of a year they spent with their father in Scotland, where there were few servants upon the place and no gardener at all. All winter Lady Rachel built the fire in the small wood stove which heated the small lean-to conservatory, and wet the plants. But they blossomed heather at Christmas and had flowering thistles as big as peonies when the wild flowers were all fast asleep under the snow. "In Scotland you must cultivate the wild flowers," they explained, in describing their floral winter.

A prospectus of the flower show is always difficult because growers hold back for the prizes, hoping to surprise other growers, but a promise is made of twenty new chrysanthemums and half that number of new roses, besides very beautiful green and blue and pink in flowers—like roses, carnations and lilies—that do not usually produce these colors.

HARRY GERMAINE.



MRS. CLEVELAND AND HER MOTHER IN THE PALM-HOUSE.
Sketched Through an Open Window.
Shows Mrs. Cleveland's New Way of Wearing Her Hair.

POLICEMEN IN SPAIN.

They Sing Out the State of the Weather and Run for the Doctor.

Spain has no Roosevelts, but the little towns and smaller cities, nevertheless, have a very effective system of night police, says the New York World. These Spanish public watchmen are clad in long, black cloaks and wear on their heads a black-and-red cap. In one hand is a lantern with colored glass, in the other a kind of lance.

"Sereno" is the name this policeman goes under, and he gets the title from the cry he is obliged to utter at every step "Sereno," which means fine. The phrase refers to the state of the weather. If the weather is cloudy he would call out, "Nublado"; if it is raining, "Lluviendo." Under the blue sky of Spain, however, it is generally "sereno."

An extract from the municipal regulations of a Spanish town details the duties of the sereno in this wise: "He must perform a certain number of rounds in all the streets, lanes, passages and alleys on his beat and call out in a loud voice the time and the weather as he goes along. He must lend assistance to citizens who request his help for any reasonable cause and go for the doctor, chemist, midwife or clergyman. In cases of robbery, assault or fire he must hurry to the scene of the occurrence as soon as he hears the signal. He must pay particular attention to such houses as are pointed out to him and report to his superiors."

Each "sereno" supervises a certain small territory, a "demarcacion," as it is called. He has three or four subordinates, who act under his orders, and are known as "vigilants." Each of these fellows has charge of a block of ten or fifteen buildings and besides having police duties he acts as a sort of porter to his houses, carrying the keys to them all and being alone able to open the doors. In the Spanish towns 10 o'clock is the signal for closing, and after that time the only way a lodger can get inside his dwelling is to summon the "vigilant." To do this he must clap his hands three times and then the "vigilant" hurries up, armed with his bunch of keys. So also if any one desires to go out during the night he claps his hands at the window and a "vigilant" appears.

When a street brawl occurs or an attack is made either "sereno" or "vigilant" blows his whistle at the first cry of help and chases off in the direction of the sound. Up come the other officers on the run, all blowing their whistles loudly. If the criminal gets away the whistles are blown in a peculiar manner, signaling in just what direction he has gone. The outer rings of "serenos" and "vigilants" take up the signal and in a few moments a wide cordon is formed in the surrounding streets, which in nine cases out of ten ends in the evil doer's capture within a few moments.

OF L'ENFANT TERRIBLE.

Infant prodigies are by no means a modern discovery, for George Parker Bidder, born in 1806, Devonshire, was exhibited as the "calculating phenomenon," and upon reaching manhood and entering parliament upset many a pretty little statement of an opponent by his shrewd brain. Zerah Colburn, born in Vermont in 1804, could square 999,999 and give the cube root of 413,993,348,677 as easily as the ordinary child adds 2 and 2. A Spanish child named Lacy, born in 1795, was brought to England and exhibited for his marvelous mathematical skill, while Germany gravely comes to the fore with little Christian Friedrich Heinecken, born in 1721, who at the age of one year knew all the principal events related in the Pentateuch; at two was well acquainted with the chief historical events of the Bible, and at three had a knowledge of universal history and geography, Latin and French. The king of Denmark had him brought to Copenhagen in 1724 to assure himself of the truth of what had been told him. It is needless to add that the child died at the tender age of four.

In France, out of 250,000 infants dying annually M. Rouvard, president of the Society for the Protection of Children says that 100,000 might be saved by careful nursing. This knowledge caused the passage of the bill forbidding the use of solid food for infants under one year of age unless advised by a physician and the use of the nursing tube was also forbidden.

Greatest Diner In the World

MRS. WILLIAM ASTOR'S DINNERS IN TWELVE MONTHS.

Ways of the Hostess—Consults a Man in Inviting Guests.

The last course had been swept from the mahogany table, the last lingering guest had bidden farewell to the hostess, the last light had been extinguished in the great salon. And alone in the big staircase hall, where she had taken leave of her guests, stood a tall, stately woman, with whitening hair, brow touched with time, yet dignified, beautiful, and the grande dame from head to foot.

MRS. WILLIAM ASTOR IN HER MORNING ROOM.
From an Instantaneous Photograph.

In parting with the last guest, Mrs. William Astor completed a year of the most famous dinner-giving on record in the social world, from the time of Marc Antony to the present day.

In the year which closed with the end of the Newport season Mrs. William Astor had entertained more than 2,000 guests at dinner, had given over 100 small dinners and presided over 50 ceremonious events. This means being hostess at a dinner party three nights of the week for a whole year and entertaining an average of twelve persons at each of these feasts. Small wonder that this lady paused, before ascending the beautiful winding staircase, to gaze out upon the broad, smooth, flower-lined roadway that sweeps down from Beechwood Inn. Many a picture must have lain in the shadows of the trees.

To be the hostess at a dinner party is one of the most trying of social functions, even if one has the host to fall back upon for assistance, as in topics of conversation, and at times of ceremony, such as leading into the dining room and leading out. The host can tell the hostess with one peculiar glance that it is time to rise from the coffee cups, and the hostess with an answering look says, "Rise and escort the ladies to the drawing room door." It is the host who leads the men back to the dining room for a smoke or to the smoking room, and who finally reconducts them to the ladies.

But in the case of this famous woman dinner-giver, it must all be done alone, for Mrs. Astor is a widow, and, though she has a son, she is far too great a dinner-giver to intrude her own family at all gatherings of young or old, literary or social.

When Mrs. Astor started in upon her career of dinner-giving, just after her retirement for Mr. Astor, she took up the thread where she had dropped it two years before, but in a much more thorough way. Her first dinners were conducted in series of six dinners, with one night between, and a different set being represented at each. And this last point she has followed out to this day, believing it to be the most successful way.

When planning a dinner Mrs. Astor's first move is to send for some gentleman of her acquaintance. And, as she always has a dinner in prospective, her mornings are spent behind the friendly samovar, consulting some one or other of her friends about the next feast. The gentleman selected is for the evening the host in many ways, and he occupies the seat of honor opposite the hostess, unless some very old or very celebrated lion is to be shown off at the dinner.

The gentleman selected goes over the list of guests with Mrs. Astor. Her first question is as to politics. She desires those of the same political hue, to make the dinner harmonious, and then those of the same tastes. When she entertains Chauncey Depew, who is a favorite dinner guest with her, she selects persons who are fond of travel or foreigners, sure that other countries will form a pleasant field for discussion.

GUESTS HARMONIOUS.

Should the dinner be for literary and artistic folk, her request to call is sent to a gentleman of literary or artistic taste. "I desire to invite So-and-so and So-and-So and So-and-so," she says, handing him a partial list of folk.

"I would not ask So-and-So," advises the careful mentor. "He is busy now writing a new opera; he would dislike to decline, and yet would much prefer, as would you, to dine later, when he will entertain you with the newest airs of his opera, and so make it interesting for the evening."

"How pleased I am to know this," replies the model hostess, and straightway selects a new name for the vacant seat. A certain Western composer of opera has often been a guest at these artistic dinners.

Ward McAllister was for years Mrs. Astor's confidential adviser regarding ceremonious dinners, though a great deal of rivalry existed between them. McAllister was jealous of Mrs. Astor's wines, and Mrs. Astor resented the way he had of following up her dinners with larger and more elaborate ones on her own lines. But the two worked together in one thing—to entertain society.

When the matter of guests has been settled the chef is called. He, overworked dignitary! has been inventing new dishes and a new menu! "This is unknown as yet," he says, taking out an elaborate menu from his pocket and describing a new creation of culinary art. At one of the dinners the "creation" was a soup made from the juice of small birds squeezed uncooked through a press. The juice was afterward highly seasoned, cooked by special process, so that the fire did not touch it, and served hot and fragrant. Its color was a clear red.

The artistic director of the establishment is next consulted. This personage in Mrs. Astor's household is a woman. She is a tall young girl of Greek parentage, and as beautiful as she is artistic.

"With the brown of the soup there should be the blue soup service," she says, consulting the menu left for her.

"Silver fish," she decides, "should be served upon the silver fish-plates, and platters, and the fish should appear in full beauty at the table." Nothing but the roast is served upon the gold set—that solid, priceless service that cost even more labor than money.

And so through the dinner. Each course, in accordance with the prevailing style, goes upon a separate set of dishes, and each is a picture in itself.

For her dinner parties Mrs. Astor dresses in black velvet always. And wonderful black velvet gowns she has! A maid laid one over a chair, supporting its folds for a certain paltry scribbler to see, and the writing woman gasped for weeks in memory of its elegance. The waist was incrusted with tiny diamonds. They belong to Mrs. Astor's unset collection, and are pierced. They are sewn on the velvet like beads, and the sparkle, as they cover the entire bodice, is greater than tongue can describe.

Another of the many velvet gowns is plain; one magnificent sweep of glowing velvet. But over it is clasped the wonderful stomacher that cost $50,000; and jewels are hung from shoulder and neck. No statelier sight was ever seen than this American hostess when she welcomes her guests at the dinner hour.

The Astor dinner is always twelve courses long; often twenty. It is the only long dinner in existence in society, all others having yielded to the modern idea of seven-course feasts. But Mrs. Astor prefers the sociability of her mahogany to the gayety of the drawing room. When young guests are invited the shorter dinner is ordered, but for veterans of society there is the full, magnificent, twenty-course service. At those dinners she gave in Fifth avenue to say farewell to her old home before it was torn down for the erection of a great hostelry, not a dinner stopped short of eighteen courses.

WHAT IT COSTS.

To be the greatest dinner giver in the world means a great deal besides being the hostess at the dinner itself. It means an enormous amount of thought and expense upon the dinner services themselves. The gold set, for example, used to cost $100 every time it was cleaned, and so deeply did the cleaning process penetrate that each time $50 worth of gold was removed by actual weighing. This summer Thomas, the trusty steward, has himself cleaned the set to preserve it from further ravages.

When a dish is broken and the set cannot be matched it is given away or sold, and when a new fork or spoon comes out in the jewelry line it is immediately purchased by Mrs. Astor, whose table boasts the newest of everything. Each week there go to her samples of queer-tined jelly forks and the oddest silver and gold scoops ever seen. If she accepts them for dinner use the patentee is assured of their future sale.

To be the greatest dinner hostess in the world means a cost of $1,000 for each dinner, and to be the model hostess means a world of good dressing and both an hereditary and cultivated fund of tact and training. But Mrs. Astor is willing to go to all the trouble to accomplish her pet social fad, and as a reward she is famed from the circle of Mme. Felix Faure, across the ocean, back home again to her own New York and Newport as the greatest dinner hostess that ever lived.

CONSTANCE MERRIFIELD.